

What Do You Think?

1. Was the Cunard Steamship Company to blame because it armed the ship and allowed war materials as part of the cargo?
2. Did Captain Schwieger of the *U-20* bear the responsibility because he failed to warn the ship that it was to be sunk and did not provide for the safety of the passengers?
3. Was the United States government to blame because it allowed Americans to travel on a British passenger ship during wartime even if the United States was neutral at the time?
4. Was the German government to blame because it ordered the sinking of an unarmed passenger liner bearing innocent civilians who were simply exercising their right to sail freely on the high seas during wartime?
5. What of Captain Turner of the *Lusitania*, was he to blame because he failed to take the precautions of requesting a convoy of destroyers, failed to follow a zig-zag course, and travelled at a slow speed to conserve fuel?
6. Were the American passengers to blame for their own fate because they failed to heed the warning notice published in the newspapers?

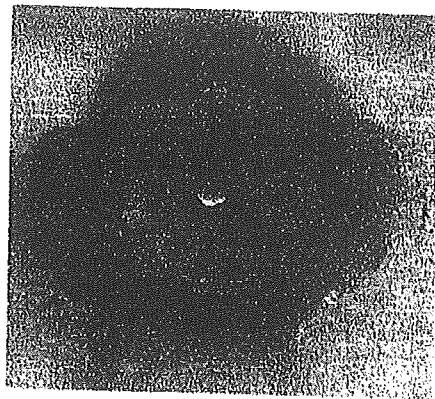
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The Decision to Drop the Atomic Bomb

Background

It is August 6, 1945. The place is Tinian, an island speck in the South Pacific. At 2:45 A.M. the evening quiet is abruptly interrupted by the roar of a B-29 bomber as it rumbles down the runway and disappears into the night. Special bombing mission #13 is underway. A single B-29, nicknamed the *Enola Gay*, embarks upon a mission which will change the course of history. The *Enola Gay* will drop the first atomic bomb in history.

At 8:09 A.M. the target city, Hiroshima, comes into view. Commander Tibbets is speaking to his crew on the plane's intercom. "We are about to start the bomb run. Put on your goggles and place them up on your forehead. When you hear the tone signal, pull the goggles over your eyes and leave them there until after the flash."



At 8:15 A.M. plus 17 seconds the bomb bay of the *Enola Gay* springs open. The plane is suddenly 10,000 pounds lighter and lurches upward with a sudden jolt. The bomb is away and the countdown of the seconds begins—38... 39... 40... 41... 42... 43...—then, a blinding flash. Below, where the city of Hiroshima had been, is a ball of fire, 1800 feet across with a temperature at its center of 100 million degrees.

It was a Monday morning in Hiroshima on August 6, 1945. Families were eating breakfast, children were preparing for school, and work at the factories was about to begin. The distant throb of an airplane engine caused little concern in the city. Japanese children had become accustomed to daily flights by weather and observation planes.

At exactly 8:16 A.M., what had been a peaceful Monday morning was suddenly transformed into a nightmare of death and destruction. Over 100,000 Japanese people died as a result of the atomic attack. This cold statement of fact conveys little real meaning until it is put into the words of school children who survived the atomic attack.

SANAE KANO (5th grade girl) 4-years old in 1945:¹

Just as we saw a bright flash there was a loud bang and I almost fainted. It was such a loud noise that it was really frightening. That time my father didn't go out to the raid. When the bomb fell, cushions and things came falling from the second floor. I caught them and tried to get outside but I couldn't get out. When Father went out some broken glass fell and stuck in his back; Father picked this glass out by himself and helped us get out of the house. Grandmother in the end collided with a post and died. She was really a kind good Grandma. Mother, while she was trying to rescue a child who lived next door, touched poison and died rather a long time later. When we tried to cross the trolley tracks they were so hot that I jumped back. When we came to the river there was a man who was really suffering; he was black all over and he kept saying, "Give me water, give me water!" I felt so sorry for him I could hardly bear it. People were in the river drinking the river water. An air raid warden was saying, "You mustn't drink the water." He was saying it but people didn't pay any attention to him and lots of people kept going into the water and dying. . . .

HIROAKI ICHIKAWA (5th grade boy) 5-years old in 1945:

That day after we escaped and came to Hijiya Bridge, there were lots of naked people who were so badly burned that the skin of their body was hanging from them like rags. And people who were all covered with blood were being put on a truck and taken away.

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Inside the government building lots of badly burned people were screaming with pain. Father and Mother have often said, "That was like being in hell. . . ."

IKUKO WAKASA (5th grade girl) 5-years old in 1945:

A man who was so badly burned that you couldn't tell whether he was a young man or an old man, was lying in front of Grandpa's house which is right next to ours. Poor thing, we laid him on the floor in our hall. Then we put a blanket down for him and gave him a pillow; while we were looking at him he swelled up to about three times his size and his whole body turned the color of dirt and got soft. Flies came all over him and he was moaning in a faint voice and an awful smell was coming from him. . . .

A half-year ago a ten-year old girl suddenly developed radiation sickness. All her hair fell out and she became entirely bald and the doctor at the Japan Red Cross Hospital frantically did everything he could for her but she vomited blood and died after twenty days. I shudder when I think that even though it is already six years after the end of the war, still people are dying in a way that reminds us of that day. . . .

KRYOKO TSUMIGA (5th grade girl) 5-years old in 1945:

Atom bombs are really horrible things aren't they? I hate them. But again North America and North Korea have started a war, haven't they. I wish the war would end quickly. I wonder why such things happen. But I think Japan ought never to wage war.

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There are lots of homeless children and shoeshine boys in Japan, aren't there. I suppose those people have no fathers and mothers. That was really an evil atom bomb wasn't it? Every single day I am praying that no matter what happens there will be peace. . . .

KEIKO SASAKI (6th grade girl) 6-years old in 1945:

At that time I was living in the country with my grandmother. She heard from some people who escaped that Hiroshima was all burned to the ground. So she set right out for Hiroshima.

About a week later when she returned, I asked, "What about Mother?" And Grandmother answered, "I brought her on my back." When she said that I was terribly happy and I shouted, "Mamma!"

But I saw that Grandmother only had a rucksack on her back, so I was suddenly disappointed. My heart sank. My grandmother and the country people burst out crying. I thought, why are they crying? I didn't realize. Grandmother took the little box out of the rucksack and showed it to them all. What she showed them was only Mother's gold tooth and the bone of her elbow. Even then I didn't understand. After three years passed, I was in the second grade, then for the first time I finally understood that Mamma had died. . . .

HISATO ITOH (11th grade boy) 10-years old in 1945:

. . . Everything in sight which can be called a building is crushed to the ground and sending out flames. People who are burned so badly that the skin

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of their bodies is peeling off in red strips are raising shrieking cries that sound as though the victims would die the next minute. The street is so covered with dead people and burned people stretched out and groaning, and the fallen houses and things, that we can't get through.

No matter how much I might exaggerate the stories of the burned people who died shrieking and of how the city of Hiroshima was burned to the ground, the facts would still be clearly more terrible and I could never really express the truth on this piece of paper; on this point I ask for pardon. . . .

As six school children reacted to the horror of that Monday morning so, too, did the crew of the bombing mission.

High above the ruined city the crew of the *Enola Gay* expressed its awe and shock. Some of the men were temporarily blinded by the flash of the blast. Crewman Caron could only say, "Holy Moses, what a mess." "My God," said another crewman, "What have we done?" "The war's over!" shouted one man. Yet another crewman could only say, "Good God, could anyone live through that down there?"

As the *Enola Gay* began the long return flight to its base on Tinian, one of the crew members paused to write a letter to his son. This is what he wrote:

August 6, 1945

10 miles off the Jap coast at 28,000 feet

Dear Walter,

This is the first grown-up letter I have ever written to you, and it is really for you to read when you are older. . . . Today the lead plane of our little formation dropped a single bomb which probably exploded with the force of 15,000 tons of high explosive. That means that the days of large bombing raids, with several hundred planes, are finished. A single plane disguised as a friendly transport can now wipe out a city. That means to me that nations will have to get along together in a friendly fashion, or suffer the consequences of sudden sneak attacks which can cripple them overnight.

What regrets I have about being a party to killing and maiming thousands of Japanese civilians this morning are tempered with the hope that this terrible weapon we have created may bring the countries of the world together and prevent further wars. Alfred Nobel thought that his invention of high explosives would have this effect by making wars too terrible, but unfortunately it had just the opposite reaction. Our new destructive force is so many thousands times worse that it may realize Nobel's dream. . . .²

THE MAN WHO MADE THE DECISION

Imagine for a moment that you are the Vice President of the United States. It is shortly before 5:00 P.M., and the

Senate has just adjourned for the day. You have stopped to chat with the Speaker of the House, but your visit with him is interrupted by a telephone call from the President's Press Secretary. With a shaky voice, he asks that you come to the White House immediately. You sense that something is wrong as you enter the White House. Your suspicions are all too quickly confirmed when the President's wife places her hand upon your shoulder and says, "The President is dead."

This event actually happened that quickly on April 12, 1945. Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who had led the American people through 12 difficult years of depression and war, had died. Suddenly, and without warning, the President's heavy burden of power and responsibility had shifted to the shoulders of Vice President Harry S. Truman. As the news and the shock of the President's death spread across the nation, people turned to each other and echoed the same question, "Who is Harry Truman?"

The man who now was President could look back upon his boyhood on a farm in Jackson County, Missouri. He completed high school and served as an artillery officer in World War I. After the war, he went into the men's clothing business and failed. In 1922 he began a political career in Kansas City which eventually led to his election as a United States Senator in 1934 and 1940. His work as chairman of a committee investigating war production won him recognition and the vice presidential nomination in 1944. As Vice President, Truman was little known and overshadowed by the towering figure of Franklin D. Roosevelt. Now Roosevelt lay dead, and Truman was the President. Soon he would be faced with, perhaps, the most

difficult decision that any President (or any man) has had to make. Truman expressed his feelings best to newspaper reporters the day after Roosevelt's death, when he said, "Boys, if you ever pray, pray for me now. . . . When they told me yesterday what had happened, I felt like the moon, the stars and all the planets had fallen on me."

The most carefully guarded secret of World War II was unknown to Harry S. Truman when he became President. Roosevelt had never told Truman that a team of British and American scientists were developing a device of tremendous destructive potential—the atomic bomb. Within a matter of weeks, Truman would be faced with the lonely responsibility of deciding if, when, and where the atomic bomb would be dropped.

History books tell us that Harry Truman made the decision to drop the atomic bomb, but they do not tell us whether his decision was right or wrong. Was the dropping of an atomic bomb upon the city of Hiroshima justified? Did President Truman make the right decision? As you read the arguments for and against the dropping of the bomb, try to decide what *you* would have done.

HARRY S. TRUMAN, President of the United States:

The final decision of where and when to use the atomic bomb was up to me. Let there be no mistake about it. I regarded the bomb as a military weapon and never had any doubt that it should be used. The top military advisers to the President recommended its use, and when I talked to Churchill he unhesitatingly told me that he favored the use of the atomic bomb if it might aid to end the war. . . .³

FLETCHER KNEBEL and CHARLES W. BAILEY, Journalists:

Nowhere in the Manhattan paper is there any indication that President Truman ever made an affirmative decision to drop the bomb. Rather, he seems to have proceeded on the assumption that the bomb would be dropped when ready. The papers tend to confirm a recent statement by Groves that Truman "was like a little boy on a toboggan" who never had an opportunity to say yes. All he could have said, Groves argued, was no. That word the President never uttered. . . .⁴

HENRY L. STIMSON, Secretary of War:

My chief purpose was to end the war in victory with the least possible cost in the lives of the men in the armies which I had helped to raise. In the light of the alternatives which, on a fair estimate, were open to us I believe that no man, in our position and subject to our responsibilities, holding in his hands a weapon of such possibilities for accomplishing this purpose and saving those lives, could have failed to use it and afterwards looked his countrymen in the face. . . .⁵

ADMIRAL WILLIAM D. LEAHY, Advisor to President Truman:

It is my opinion that the use of this barbarous weapon at Hiroshima and Nagasaki was of no material assistance in our war against Japan. The Japanese were already defeated and ready to surrender because of the effective sea blockade and the successful bombing with conventional weapons. . . .

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"Bomb" is the wrong word to use for this new weapon. It is not a bomb. It is not an explosive. It is a poisonous thing that kills people by its deadly radioactive reaction, more than by the explosive force it develops. My own feeling was that in being the first to use it, we had adopted an ethical standard common to the barbarians of the Dark Ages. . . .⁶

DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER, Supreme Allied Commander in Europe:

General Eisenhower expressed the hope that we would never have to use such a weapon against an enemy because he disliked seeing the United States "initiate the use" of anything so horrible and destructive. . . .⁷

WINSTON CHURCHILL, Prime Minister of Great Britain:

There never was a moments discussion (at Potsdam) as to whether the atomic bomb should be used or not. The historic fact remains, and must be judged in the after time, that the decision to use the atomic bomb to compel the surrender of Japan was never an issue. . . . There was unanimous, automatic, unquestioned agreement around our table; nor did I ever hear the slightest suggestion that we should do otherwise. . . .⁸

LESLIE R. GROVES, General in charge of the Manhattan Project:

In my opinion, his (Truman's) resolve to continue with the original plan will always stand as an

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act of unsurpassed courage and wisdom—courage because, for the first time in the history of the United States, the President personally determined the course of a major military strategic and tactical operation for which he could be considered directly responsible; and wisdom because history, if any thought is given to the value of American lives, has conclusively proven that his decision was correct. . . .⁹

GENERAL CARL SPAATZ, Commander of the Strategic Air Forces:

The dropping of the bomb was done by military men under military orders. We're supposed to carry out orders and not question them. . . .¹⁰

GENERAL CURTIS LEMAY, Commander of the 20th Air Force:
I think President Truman made the proper decision because I firmly believe that it saved lives in the long run by doing it and shortened the war and that was what we were after at the time. . . .¹¹

* Considering the Case

1. What did General Groves (quoted by Knebel and Bailey) mean when he said that Truman "was like a little boy on a toboggan" who never had an opportunity to say yes?
2. What reasons did Secretary of War Stimson give for dropping the bomb?
3. Why did Admiral Leahy think it was a mistake to drop the bomb?

- * 4. Do you agree with General Spaatz that a military man should carry out orders without questioning them? Why or why not?
5. Why did General Lemay think that Truman made the correct decision?

WAS JAPAN FAIRLY WARNED AND GIVEN A CHANCE TO SURRENDER?

Critics of President Truman contend that he failed to warn the Japanese that they would be attacked with an atomic bomb and thus gave them no opportunity to surrender until the bomb was dropped. The critics also contend that the bomb could have been dropped in an unpopulated area to demonstrate its power. Such a demonstration they argue, would have convinced the Japanese to surrender without needless bloodshed and long-term suffering.

On July 26, 1945, the governments of the Soviet Union, the United States, and Great Britain issued a joint statement known as the Potsdam Declaration. This document included a call for Japan to surrender and warned Japan of what would happen if it did not surrender.

From the Potsdam Declaration . . . July 26, 1945:

. . . We call upon the Government of Japan to proclaim now the unconditional surrender of all Japanese armed forces, and to provide proper and adequate assurances of their good faith in such action. The alternative for Japan is prompt and utter destruction. . . .¹²

HENRY L. STIMSON, the United States Secretary of War:

On July 28 the Premier of Japan, Suzuki, rejected the Potsdam ultimatum by announcing that it was 'unworthy of public notice.' In the face of this rejection we could only proceed to demonstrate that the ultimatum had meant exactly what it said. . . .¹³

HANSON W. BALDWIN, journalist and author:

Not only was the Potsdam ultimatum merely a restatement of the politically impossible—unconditional surrender—but it could hardly be construed as a direct warning of the atomic bomb and was not taken as such by anyone who did not know the bomb had been created. . . . American ingenuity could have found ways to bring home to the Japanese the impossibility of their position and the horrors of the weapon being held over them; yet we rushed to use the bomb as soon as the unconditional surrender was rejected.

Had we devised some demonstration or given a more specific warning than the Potsdam ultimatum, and had the Japanese still persisted in continued resistance after some weeks of our psychological offensive, we should perhaps have been justified in the bomb's use; at least, our hands would have been more clean. . . .¹⁴

Critics of Truman's decision further argue that a harmless demonstration of the power of the atomic bomb would have convinced the Japanese to surrender without bloodshed.

HENRY L. STIMSON, Secretary of War:

The Interim Committee, on June 1, recommended that the bomb should be used against Japan, without specific warning, as soon as possible, and against such a target as to make clear its devastating strength. Any other course, in the opinion of the committee, involved serious danger to the major objective of obtaining a prompt surrender from the Japanese. An advisory panel of distinguished atomic physicists reported that "we can propose no technical demonstration likely to bring an end to the war; we see no acceptable alternative to direct military use. . . ."¹⁵

JAMES F. BYRNES, Special Advisor to President Truman:

We feared that, if the Japanese were told that the bomb would be used on a given locality, they might bring our boys who were prisoners of war to that area. Also, the experts had warned us that the static test which was to take place in New Mexico, even if successful, would not be conclusive proof that a bomb would explode when dropped from an airplane. If we were to warn the Japanese of the new highly destructive weapon in the hope of impressing them and if the bomb then failed to explode we would have given aid and comfort to the Japanese militarists. . . .¹⁶

RALPH A. BARD, Undersecretary of the Navy:
(Before the bomb was dropped)

Ever since I have been in touch with this program I have had a feeling that before the bomb is actually

used against Japan that Japan should have some preliminary warning for say two or three days in advance of use. The position of the United States as a great humanitarian nation and the fair play attitude of our people generally is responsible for this feeling. . . .

(After the bomb was dropped)

. . . It was quite logical to hope and expect that with the proper kind of warning the Japanese would have made peace and we wouldn't have had to drop the bomb and have to bring Russia in and we wouldn't have had to give them all the tremendous things we gave them for five days' participation in the war. . . .

ARTHUR H. COMPTON, scientist and advisor to Truman:

. . . We (the scientists) were determined to find, if we could, some effective way of demonstrating the power of an atomic bomb without loss of life that would impress Japan's warlords. If only this could be done!

Though the possibility of a demonstration that would not destroy human lives was attractive, no one could suggest a way in which it could be made so convincing that it would likely stop the war. . . .

- * 1. In your opinion, was the Potsdam Declaration a fair warning to Japan? Why or why not?
- 2. If you had been President Truman, would you have given the Japanese warning of an atomic attack? If so, how? If not, why not?

WAS JAPAN ALREADY DEFEATED

WHEN THE ATOMIC BOMB WAS DROPPED?

Many critics of President Truman contend that there was no need to drop the atomic bomb on Hiroshima because Japan was already defeated in August of 1945. They argue that there would have been no need to invade the Japanese mainland and that the bomb did not significantly shorten the war and did not save enough lives to justify its use.

ADMIRAL WILLIAM D. LEAHY:

. . . The Japanese were already defeated and were ready to surrender because of the effective sea blockade and the successful bombing of conventional weapons. . . .

Report of The United States Strategic Bombing Survey (1945):

Based on a detailed investigation of all the facts and supported by the testimony of the surviving Japanese leaders involved, it is the Survey's opinion that certainly prior to 31 December 1945, and in all probability prior to November 1, 1945, Japan would have surrendered even if the atomic bombs had not been dropped, even if Russia had not entered the war, and even if no invasion had been planned or contemplated. . . .

GENERAL H. H. ARNOLD, Chief of the United States Air Corps:

. . . It always appeared to us that atomic bomb or

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no atomic bomb, the Japanese were already on the verge of collapse . . . Nevertheless the abrupt surrender of Japan came more or less as a surprise, for we had figured we would probably have to drop about four atomic bombs. . . .²¹

CLEMENT ATTLEE, Prime Minister of Great Britain:

In the light of what we knew at the time, which was that the military were in command in Japan and that the Japanese would fight to the last man. . . . In the light of that I figure the decision was right. . . .²²

COLONEL SABURO HAYASHI, Secretary to the Japanese War Minister:

We were prepared to stage the decisive battle on the Japanese mainland right before the end of the war. We thought we would be able to beat the Americans on their first landing attempt. But if the Americans launched a second or third attack our food supply would run out. We didn't have sufficient weapons nor could we have made more. . . .²³

KARL COMPTON, atomic scientist and advisor to the President:

. . . There was every reason to think that the Japanese would defend their homeland with even greater fanaticism than when they fought to the death on Iwo Jima and Okinawa. No American soldier who survived the bloody struggle on those islands has much sympathy with the view that battle with the Japanese was over as soon as it was clear that their

ultimate situation was hopeless. No, there was every reason to expect a terrible struggle long after the point at which some people can now look back and say, "Japan was already beaten."²⁴

In your opinion, was Japan already defeated when the atomic bomb was dropped? Give the reasons for your answer.

WAS THE ATOMIC BOMB ACTUALLY DROPPED TO IMPRESS THE SOVIET UNION RATHER THAN JAPAN?

Following the surrender of Germany, relations between the United States and the Soviet Union deteriorated rapidly. Some American leaders felt that the Soviet Union was a greater military threat to the United States than Japan ever had been or ever would be. Some critics of President Truman contend that he decided to drop the atomic bomb because it would demonstrate the military power of the United States to the leaders of the Soviet Union. The critics further argue that Truman wanted Japan to surrender before Russia entered the war in the Pacific so there would be no need for a joint Russo-American occupation of Japan of the kind that was creating so many problems in Germany.

PATRICK BLACKETT, British scientist and writer:

. . . we may conclude that the dropping of the atomic bombs was not so much the last military act of the second world war, as the first major operation of the

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cold diplomatic war with Russia now in progress. . . . One can imagine the hurry with which the two bombs—the only two existing—were whisked across the Pacific to be dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki just in time, but only just, to insure that the Japanese Government surrendered to American forces alone. . . .²⁵

LEN GIOVANNITTI AND FRED FREED, NBC reporters and authors:

It can be argued persuasively that the Soviet Union was, in the final days before Hiroshima, much on the minds of Truman, Byrnes and Stimson. This does not, however, mean that their sole or even primary reason for using the bomb was as a political weapon against the Russians. The political consideration was an additional reason. . . .²⁶

JAMES F. BYRNES, special advisor to President Truman:

. . . . It was ever present in my mind that it was important that we should have an end to the war before the Russians came in. . . .

Personally, I was praying that the Japanese would see the wisdom of surrendering and we could bring the war to an end before the Russians got in. . . .²⁷

LEO SZILARD, Professor of Physics and a leading spokesman in opposition to dropping the bomb:

Mr. Byrnes's concern about Russia I fully shared, but his view that our possessing and demonstrating the bomb would make Russia more manageable in Europe I was not able to share. Indeed I could

hardly imagine any premise more false or disastrous upon which to base our policy, and I was dismayed when a few weeks later I learned that he was to be our Secretary of State. . . .²⁸

What Do You Think?

1. Was the bombing of Hiroshima necessary and justifiable?
2. What were the alternatives to dropping the atomic bomb?
3. If *you* had been President Truman, what decision would you have made?